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O 171226Z OCT 08 ZDK CTG NUMEROUS REQUESTS  
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2088  
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE  
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001532

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, NEA  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: SUDAN PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE: NO SUBSTANCE YET

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1528

B) KHARTOUM 1521

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Sudan People's Initiative commenced in Khartoum October 16 with a show of solidarity among Sudan's current and former leaders; two former Sudanese heads of state (Suwar al Dahab and Sadiq al Mahdi) joined President Bashir on the dais along with FVP and GOSS President Salva Kiir and DPA Signatory Minni Minawi. No rebels attended the opening ceremony, nor will they attend the week-long conference in Kenana which is expected to produce a matrix of possible solutions to the Darfur crisis. Overall, the first day of the SPI - a tedious succession of fifteen speeches - came across as more of a political rally and show of support to President Bashir rather than a commitment to resolving the Darfur crisis. In his speech, President Bashir touched on all the right topics (an end to conflict, land rights, compensation, and protection of IDPs) but did not offer any concrete proposals, nor did he offer to negotiate directly with rebels. Participants headed to Kenana late in the day October 16 but no date has been announced for the commencement of talks in Doha. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Without any rebels in attendance at the opening of the SPI (not expected given the security concerns of any rebel coming to Khartoum) DPA signatory Minni Minawi used his speech as an opportunity to push for DPA implementation and complain about promised but still undelivered funding for the Darfur Reconstruction and Development Fund. Minawi publicly welcomed the SPI and particularly the Qatari initiative, and the support of the Arabs in ending the Darfur crisis, which he said was "better late than never."

¶3. (SBU) FVP and GOSS President Salva Kiir called for an immediate ceasefire in Darfur and in perhaps the most damaging comment of the day, said that the SPI should be more than just "self dialogue" and public relations. He pointed out that rebels and civil society must participate and that the SPI must address the root causes of the conflict in Darfur. Kiir also pointed to the proliferation of initiatives and said that the SPI must be combined with the Qatari initiative. Kiir said that Sudan also must "put right" its relationship with its neighbors and make peace with Chad.

¶4. (SBU) Pursuing a personal agenda, Sadiq al Mahdi gave the most eloquent and politically-savvy speech, calling on the government to hold elections and broaden participation in the GNU, which as he pointed out currently excludes all political voices other than the NCP and SPLM. Al Mahdi said that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement complicates finding a solution to Darfur, since the CPA "puts ceilings" on participation in government. Al Mahdi called for an end to impunity but said that it was not right for to seek an ICC indictment of President Bashir. Al Mahdi said the international

community has a role to play in ending the conflict, but "the Sudanese must define their needs." "The U.S. committed grave mistakes in Sudan," said Mahdi, but had also shown a willingness to help find solutions to Sudan's problems. Al-Mahdi was the only speaker to directly refer to the United States and, not surprisingly, President Bashir seemed to strongly favor Al-Mahdi's clever and hypocritical spin on Sudan's current dilemma.

15. (SBU) Using a teleprompter, a solemn President Bashir spoke in an authoritative, militaristic voice as he recounted his skewed version of history in Darfur. He pointed out that the seeds for the conflict began even before the NIF took power in 1989. He claimed that, at the time, his government had made an effort to resolve tribal disputes and open pastoral routes. Bashir touched on many of the right points required to solve the crisis in Darfur (compensation, land rights, protection of IDPs, rule of law, and an end to hostilities) but did not lay out any specific proposals and did not commit to anything in terms of concessions to rebels. Bashir described a number of development projects that had been attempted in Darfur, but admitted that some of them were stymied by the conflict. However he committed himself to additional development projects including road construction and promised \$250 million in development in Darfur over the next year. Bashir also said that he is committed to the deployment of UNAMID "according to its mandate." He committed himself to finding a "final, durable solution" to Darfur, and called on all parties to attend the talks in Doha. Most of the speech seemed a rehash of remarks he made in early August during his Darfur tour.

16. (SBU) UN/AU Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole gave the most substantive speech of the day in terms of pressing for negotiations with rebels. He expressed skepticism in the SPI and urged that the process must lead to "direct dialogue with the movements" and should

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"address modalities to end the conflict." The Qatari State Minister of Foreign Affairs gave a particularly flaccid speech calling for reconciliation between the Sudanese. The Qataris did not announce a date for the commencement of talks in Doha.

17. (SBU) Arab League Chairman Amr Moussa called for an end to the conflict "which has gone on too long," while African Union Secretary General Jean Ping urged that the SPI take into account the views of the Darfurians. Libyan Foreign Minister Treiki gave a highly politicized, anti-western speech announcing that "we must stand against the conspiracy to divide Sudan," and expressing support for the people of Palestine and Iraq, victims of similar unnamed conspiracies. The Egyptian and Eritrean foreign ministers gave balanced, thoughtful speeches about the need for comprehensive solutions that took into account the needs of the people in Darfur and ensured stability in Sudan. CDA Fernandez expressed cautious skepticism about the meeting to the assembled Arab and Sudanese press noting that "substantive change" Darfur would be proof of the credibility of any initiative.

18. (SBU) Participants flew to Kenana, White Nile State, the afternoon of October 16 to begin work in six committees that will propose solutions to the Darfur crisis while Bashir named an NCP loyalist as rapporteur for the Kenana discussions. No date has been announced for the commencement of talks in Qatar, though NCP officials continue to look toward the end of the month. JMST officers told polchief that Bassole and his team had not been invited to Kenana for the next phase of the SPI. Chief of Staff Yasser Sabra said the NCP had informed them that the next phase in Kenana is intended to be for Sudanese political and civil society leaders to develop a matrix of solutions on various issues, which can then be used in Doha as a starting point for discussions. Sabra said that the NCP expects Bassole to meet with rebels to ascertain their views on the key issues. NCP politburo chief Mandour al Mahdi confirmed this, telling polchief that the objective for Kenana is for the six committees to produce a laundry list of proposals which can be negotiated with the rebels in Doha. He urged the US to pressure the rebels to attend, and claimed the GOS would be willing to meet with key rebels on a bilateral basis. (Note: The six committees that will meet in Kenana are: 1) The Committee on Options for the Settlement of the Darfur Problem, 2) The Committee on

External Policies, 3) the Committee on IDPs, Refugees and Voluntary Return (Humanitarian Affairs), 4) The Committee on Services and Development, 5) The Committee on Services and Development, 6) The Information Committee. End note). Not surprisingly, issues such as accountability for past crimes and disarming pro-regime militias seem to be - for now - off the table

19. (SBU) Comment: Overall, the opening of the SPI appeared to be more of a political rally and show of support to President Bashir than a sincere change of heart on Darfur. The lack of substance in the speech by the Qatari State Minister was troubling, but many Sudanese appear confident that with their deep pockets and financial influence/leverage over the Sudanese regime, the Qataris will be able to "buy off rebels" and force the regime to make the necessary concessions, as well as provide development funds for Darfur. Particularly troubling was the presence of Arab militia leader Musa Hilal, who along with many participants danced to "I am Sudanese, I am African," a mainstay song of unity at these types of events. However, there were some small signs of hope that the government may be serious in this effort - such as the presence of civil society leaders and academics such as Professor Al Tayeb from the University of Khartoum, who is among those who have put the most thought into possible solutions on Darfur. Al Tayeb and NCP polchief Mandour al Mahdi appeared to be deep in conversation following the speeches, and Al Tayeb told polchief that he may attend part of the conference in Kenana and may submit some of his proposals to the effort. The key to success in Doha over the next few weeks will be how the Qataris and Chief Mediator Bassole are able to push the regime on specific concessions to rebels that will lure them to the negotiating table. If the key rebels refuse to attend the talks in Doha, they will be a failure, just as the talks in Sirte, Libya last year were a failure, and the Darfur crisis will grind on -- until the Sudanese regime is able to reach out and make critical concessions to the rebels, with or without the theater of formal peace talks and conferences. Whether the proposed solutions that emerge next week from Kenana actually contain some substance will show whether the SPI is a serious attempt by the regime to solve Darfur, or just a cynical charade intended to check a box off the Arab League's plan to save Bashir from an ICC indictment.

FERNANDEZ